

May 2024

Birding Observer

Newsletter of the Five Valleys Audubon Society



CALENDAR

Monday, May 6th, 6:00-7:45 pm:
The board meeting will be held in the Blackfoot Room of the Missoula Public Library.

May 11th, 8:00 am: This month's Town Bound Birding Series will bring you to Kelly Island to possibly see Calliope Hummingbirds, Bullock's Oriole and more. Park at Kelly Island FAS.

Monday, May 13th, 7:00 pm: Our May program meeting will focus on waterfowl conservation. See details to the right.

Saturday, May 18th, 10:00 am:
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.

Saturday, May 25th, 8:00 am: All-day field trip to the Bandy Ranch which is near Upsata Lake in the Ovando Valley. Meet at 8:00 am in the Missoula College parking lot. There will be 2-3 miles of moderate hiking.

Saturday, June 1st, 8:00 am: Half-day field trip to the Bass Creek to look for Bobolinks, led by William Boggs. Meet at 8am in the west end of the Walmart 93 south parking lot, near the garden center. One mile of level hiking.

Montana Waterfowl Conservation

Please join us on Monday, May 13th at 7:00 PM for our final monthly chapter meeting before the summer break. We're excited to welcome Mark Mariano to present his talk, **Journey of a Waterfowl Protection Specialist: from the Berkeley Pit to Montana's Newest Conservation Nonprofit.**

Mark will tell us about his last seven years as the self-proclaimed "Waterfowl Protection Specialist" for the Berkeley Pit Waterfowl Protections Program. He will explain how he infuses his understanding of waterfowl ecology and migration phenology into the program's framework.



Mark finds his work fascinating, and it has led him to in his words, "Become utterly consumed by waterfowl." His enthusiasm for waterfowl conservation has boiled over into the creation of Montana Wetlands and Waterfowl, Montana's only state-based, waterfowl-focused conservation organization. The organization focuses on education and conservation programs with kids in the Butte, Anaconda, and Helena school districts.

With a background in ecological restoration from the University of Montana and graduate studies at Montana Tech, Mark has contributed to the remediation efforts on the Butte hill and engaged in the Superfund cleanup of the Clark Fork River Valley. He has worked his way to the head of the watershed, where he has dedicated himself to safeguarding waterfowl along their migration route in western Montana.

Outside of work, Mark is an active volunteer in the conservation community, serving on multiple boards. When not immersed in conservation efforts, you'll find him outdoors, pursuing passions for all things that swim or fly.

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/92491292745>

Peeps From Your Board By Larry Weeks

The Beginning Bird Walks at the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge are held on the third Saturday of each month. This past year (Apr 2023 thru Mar 2024) included 12 field trips. The December field trip was held on the second Saturday to avoid a conflict with the Missoula Christmas Bird Count. The bird walks start at 10:00 am at the Visitor's Center and last about three hours. The first two hours include birding Ponds 5 and 6 followed by a short hike on the Kenai Trail to Pond 8. Then the trip moves to the Wildlife Viewing Area.



Trumpeter Swan
Photo by Vilijandas Bagdonavičius

The average attendance for the past year was 14 people with a high of 27 and a low of 5. There were 94 bird species seen during the past year. This compares to 100 species in 2022-23. We heard Virginia Rail on most trips and Trumpeter Swans were seen on 8 consecutive trips starting in August. A Great Horned Owl has used a cavity nest on the paved trail for three consecutive years. According to the photographers, the owlets have been predated by a pine (American) marten for the previous 2 years. The most unusual bird seen was a Great-tailed Grackle. On December 9th, we had a male grackle and on February 17th, we had a female grackle. One of the Trumpeter Swans had yellow legs and feet that was photographed by Alex Kearney. The yellow legs and feet are a leucistic characteristic. A White Pelican was seen throughout the fall including the December field trip. It was speculated that the pelican did not survive the winter. Some of the more unusual birds included Barrow's Goldeneye, Merlin, Lesser Yellowlegs, Brown Creeper, Orange-crowned Warbler, and American Tree Sparrow. The Chapter has gained several memberships as a result of these field trips.

Ninepipes Field Trip Summary By Larry Weeks

Saturday, April 6th: This field trip was to the Ninepipes area to look for displaying Short-eared Owls (SEOW). Only 10 people participated, which was probably due to the intimidating weather forecast. However, except for the cool temperatures, it wasn't raining, and the wind was mild. Four people met at the Missoula College parking lot at 4:00 pm. I picked up 2 people at the "Y" and 2 more people met us on Dublin Gulch Road. Two other people joined us on Logan Road at about 6:00 pm. The first stop was on Post Creek Road where a Great Horned Owl was on a nest. A nearby nest had a Red-tailed Hawk. Some ponds along the road had a good collection of ducks and two Trumpeter Swans that took off and flew over our heads. On Logan Road, there was a large nest with an adult Bald Eagle perched near the nest. Another body of water along Logan Road had more waterfowl. On Ninepipes Lane, just past the Owl Research Institute, we had our first SEOW and a Northern Harrier. From the Ninepipes dam, we could see many gulls and an immature Bald eagle in the distance, and some more Trumpeter Swans close to the dam. We then proceeded to Duck Road where we immediately started seeing SEOWs. One owl in particular was flying at over 500 feet and doing many displays where it was clapping its wings together and dropping 10 – 15 feet. Some of the people were able to hear a soft hoot-hoot-hoot during the display. We had an estimated six SEOWs at that location. There was another individual west of us who was photographing the owls. When we stopped to chat with him, we saw four more SEOWs. We then proceeded south on Ninepipes Road past Olson Road. The owls were very active when the author's car was parked. One owl was close to the road and did several spectacular displays at a height of about 30 feet. Another owl landed on the ground, and I was able to give everyone a scope view. I estimated that there were at least five SEOWs at this location. We ended up seeing at least 16 SEOWs which is outstanding for this field trip, and we had 26 bird species.



Short-eared Owl
Photo by Tim Lenz

Upcoming Multi-day Field Trips

By Larry Weeks

June 8th & 9th: The two-day field trip to Freezout Lake and Benton Lake is scheduled for June 8th and 9th. The plan is to leave Missoula at 7:00 am on June 8th and drive to Freezout Lake. We will spend the night at the Stage Stop Inn (406-466-5900). Participants are asked to make reservations in advance and bring lunches for two days. We will eat dinner together at a local restaurant. Breakfast will be provided by the motel. We will drive to Benton Lake on June 9th. Please contact Larry if you plan to attend, and he will coordinate carpooling. There is a \$10 charge for multi-day field trips. Expect about one mile of level hiking.

June 11th–14th: A four-day field trip to Malta and Bowdoin NWR is scheduled for June 11th–14th. We will camp at James Kipp Recreational Area on the first night and at the city park in Malta the next two nights. Please contact Larry if you plan to attend, and he will coordinate carpooling and meals. There is a \$10 charge for multi-day field trips. There will be one mile of level hiking.

Lee Metcalf NWR Field Trip Summary

By William Boggs

Saturday, March 23rd: Despite near-freezing temperatures and a forecast of snow, six participants spent the day at Metcalf Refuge, walking the entire Kenai Trail in the morning and the Wildlife Viewing Area trail in the afternoon. Although the numbers of birds were quite low, the birdwatching (and listening) was interesting. Working at it, we managed to see eleven of the nineteen species of ducks we see every spring in Western Montana, including our first pair of Northern Shovelers. The Sandhill Cranes were very active and noisy, calling and flying all morning from across the marsh. Numbers of Northern Harriers put on spectacular flying displays. We had an excellent view of our first Yellow-headed Blackbird of the spring and were reintroduced to its fine weird song. A Virginia Rail ka-dicked



Sandhill Crane
Photo by Keith Kohl

over and over fifteen feet below us in the marsh grass and remained invisible as ever. We also had a very good view of an American Tree Sparrow undoubtedly about ready to depart for the north, and imbibed its sweet song. We then flushed some handsome California Quail, who also called. From the end of the trail, we scoped out eight of the Metcalf's Trumpeter Swans on Pond Eleven far to the north. In the afternoon, we found the male Great-horned Owl sleepily guarding its nest hole from an adjacent ponderosa pine and saw the mother's head (we think). As often happens, the resident Pileated Woodpecker pair called and showed themselves in the vicinity of the owl tree. Those of us who drove south at the end of the field trip were rewarded with very close views of a pair of Sandhill Cranes foraging in the field just to the south of the Refuge. At the end of the day, we'd seen or heard 53 species in the grey and cold.

Migration Watch Field Trip & Migration Day at Ft Missoula Natural Area

By Poody McLaughlin

The chapter is sponsoring two spring birding events that feature the remarkable habitats around the Bitterroot River and Fort Missoula. The riparian area and ponds by Fort Missoula host one of the largest waterfowl migration stops in the Missoula Valley. The Fort Missoula Ponds complex is an exceptional biodiversity hot spot that attracts many species of ducks, geese, and swans during migration, as well as an impressive variety of loons, grebes, cormorants, and even shorebirds.

The first Migration Watch Event is on Monday, May 13 from 4:30-6:30 p.m. The Learning with Meaning School will host the walk on their property west of the Fort Missoula Ponds, which will provide an excellent birds-eye overview of the ponds as well as extensive views of pristine riparian habitat. Five Valleys Audubon and the Clark Fork Coalition are co-sponsors. The event is free, but registration is required. To register, go to <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/fort-missoula-ponds-migration-watch-2-tickets-876971815307>

The Migration Day at Fort Missoula Natural Area will be on Wednesday, May 29 beginning at 8 a.m. This will be a bird survey documenting the rich bird life at Fort Missoula from Slevan's Island downstream to the Fort Missoula Ponds. We anticipate forming 3 survey groups to cover different sections of the riverfront. To join a survey group and for more information, contact me at poodymc@gmail.com.

New from Montana Audubon

Wings Across the Big Sky Festival- Field Trip Highlight Lake Helena WMA- Canoe/Kayak

This field trip will consist of a relatively short walk that will encounter shrub passerines – including Savannah Sparrow - and associated species. We will then embark in canoes and/or kayaks for several hours enjoying marshland, cattail, and sandbar/mudflat habitats. There will be a wide variety of waterfowl, Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, Sora, Virginia Rail, White-faced Ibis, gulls, and terns, possibly including Black Terns and Bonaparte's Gull. We will also likely encounter pelicans, swallows, Bald Eagle, Wilson's Snipe, and phalaropes. During the first week of June in 2022 and 2023, the White-rumped Sandpiper, commonly a late migrant, was documented here.

Participants are encouraged to bring their own canoes/kayaks and PFDs, but local chapter members will endeavor to provide help with these if needed. This trip is offered on both Saturday and Sunday, but space is limited, so register today!

Find more festival info, and register online, on our website: <https://mtaudubon.org/events/wings/>

Long-billed Curlew Surveys Are Back!



The warm and sunny days of Spring are fast approaching, and with that comes the familiar “cur-lee-ee” of the Long-Billed Curlew, an icon of America’s prairies.

The Long-Billed Curlew depends on Montana’s grasslands for breeding and continues to decline across its range due to loss of this habitat to the development of agriculture and infrastructure. With this decline, more research is needed to assess the health and conservation needs of the population, so we need your help surveying these charismatic shorebirds in three locations: Mission Valley, Helena Valley, and Blackfoot Valley! Two survey windows will be available for citizen scientists to participate in this unique effort: **April 8th through May 7th**, and **May 8th through May 31st**. If you are interested in participating, email Gwynne at gwynne@mtaudubon.org and visit our [citizen science website](#) for more information!



**Wings Across The Big Sky
Montana's Premier Birding Festival
May 31 – June 2, 2024 in Helena, MT
For more information, visit
www.mtaudubon.org/events/wings/**

A poster for 'Raptor Day at the Mansion'. The top half features a large photograph of a Bald Eagle with its wings spread, perched on a person's hand. The person is wearing sunglasses and a grey hoodie. The background is a clear blue sky. The text on the poster is as follows:

Raptor Day at the Mansion

**WILD SKIES RAPTOR CENTER
PRESENTATION and FUNDRAISER**

Meet some of our Ambassador Birds!

**Raptor Rehabilitation -
from Rescue to Release**

JUNE 9, 2024 Time: 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Daly Mansion Lawns, 251 Eastside Hwy, Hamilton, MT

Free event, but donations welcomed
Bring your own water bottles and chairs

Wild Skies
RAPTOR CENTER



Welcome New Members

Suzanne Aboulfadl Mary Coar
Carol Gorden Julie Macklewicz
Angela Miller F.M. Nordgulen
Charlotte Orr Mary Osborne
Stephanie Rosier Karen Schilke
Caron Skilling Karen Louise Weaver Temper of the Times Foundation



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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 or Membership Promotion Chair, Thomas Kallmeyer at 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.)

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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