April 2019

Birding Observer

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

Calendar of Events

- **Monday, April 1st, 6:45-8:45pm:** The FVAS Board meeting will take place at the Missoula Public Library, in the Director's Office, on the main floor--walk east past the main desk and reference area to the office.
- **Saturday, April 6th, 4pm:** Five-hour late day field trip to the Ninepipes area to look for Short-eared Owls. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 4pm.
- **Monday, April 8th, 7pm:** Our April program meeting will feature Megan Fylling and Mike Krzywicki, from the UM Bird Ecology Lab, who will discuss birds and conservation along the Clark Fork River. Philip L. Wright Research Award recipients will also give brief presentations. Please join us in Room 123 of the Gallagher Business Building on the UM campus.
- **Monday, April 15th:** The deadline for the May 2019 edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, April 20th:** Bird walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR from 10:00 am-Noon. Meet field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center. Please note that the Visitor's Center is not open on weekends, so no restrooms are available.
- **Saturday, April 27th:** All-day field trip to Brown's Lake. Meet at 7:50am in the northwest corner of the Adam Center parking lot.
- **April (Various Dates):** Workshop for Beginning & Intermediate Birders. See details on page 2.

Birds & Conservation along the Clark Fork

We're proud to welcome Megan Fylling and Mike Krzywicki from the University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab to our April Program Meeting.

Megan will talk to us about Lewis's Woodpeckers, which are declining in many parts of their range. The Important Bird Areas on the Clark Fork and Bitterroot rivers provide refuge for Lewis's Woodpeckers. Specifically, Megan will discuss the recent studies of habitat characteristics and landscape development pressures to see how those factors affect Lewis's Woodpeckers.

Mike's talk will focus on studies conducted by University of Montana scientists on the response of Osprey and songbirds to Superfund cleanup efforts in the Clark Fork Watershed. Their research fits into a larger project aimed at educating the public about past mining effects in the country's largest Superfund site. What have we learned so far, and how can those lessons guide future efforts?

Megan Fylling is a Wildlife Biologist. She has studied birds and their ecology throughout the western U.S. and enjoys birding as a hobby. She currently works for the University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab and has worked on various projects including fire ecology, restoration ecology, songbird banding, Gray Catbird overwintering project, and the Bird's-eye View Education program.

Mike Krzywicki is the Project Coordinator for the UM Bird Ecology Lab's 'Bird's Eye View Education Program, which educates people about the importance of riparian areas to birds and other wildlife. Since 2012 he has worked as a field biologist throughout the American West, primarily in the San Francisco Bay area and western Montana.

**Preceding Megan's and Mike's presentations, PL Wright Award recipients Katie Zarn and Dakota Vaccaro will present, "Quantifying bias in mitochondrial DNA production for improved aquatic community monitoring," and "Impacts of first year post-fire burned habitat on wildlife presence in high elevation coniferous mountain forests," respectively.

If you wish to join us, please assemble at 7pm, on Monday, April 8th in room 123 of the Gallagher Business Building on the University of Montana campus.

Peeps from the Board: Birders Bust a Move
By Rose Leach

I did not realize it, but I have something in common with John James Audubon. But it's not artwork—stick figures give me difficulty. It turns out that Audubon, who traveled with his fiddle and played local dances, also taught dances such as reels and cotillions (a French social dance similar to English Country or Contra Dances of today). At least that was reported by Phil Jamison in his 2015 book *Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics: Roots and Branches of Southern Appalachian Dance*. And no, this is not an April fool's joke. You can google the book and find it online. It turns out, I am a dancer too, and while not a professional instructor, I do teach steps and leads that I have learned over the years at workshops and other venues.

A fellow dancer and friend sent me a scan of the relevant passages from Hoedowns, so that I can't cite the page number for you. But in the section labeled "Dancing Masters and Dancing Schools", Jamison describes French dancing masters, including Audubon, who traveled upstream from New Orleans to cities both large and small to teach and play for the local communities.

Jamison wrote: "One of these French dancing masters was ornithologist and painter John James Audubon (1785-1851), who came to the United States from France in 1803 at age eighteen. In 1808 Audubon traveled down the Ohio River from Pittsburgh, and at the Falls of the Ohio (Louisville) he attended a 'Barbicue [sic] on the Fourth of July', where he danced 'reels and cotillions [sic]". In addition to being an artist, Audubon played the fiddle and flute, and he later taught music, dancing, and fencing (as well as drawing) in various communities along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, including New Orleans. During the winter of 1825-26, as a way to finance travel to Europe, Audubon held a dancing school on Friday and Saturday nights at the village of Woodville, in southern Mississippi. Playing fiddle while he instructed sixty pupils in popular dances of the day, Audubon earned about two thousand dollars that season, a considerable sum at the time".

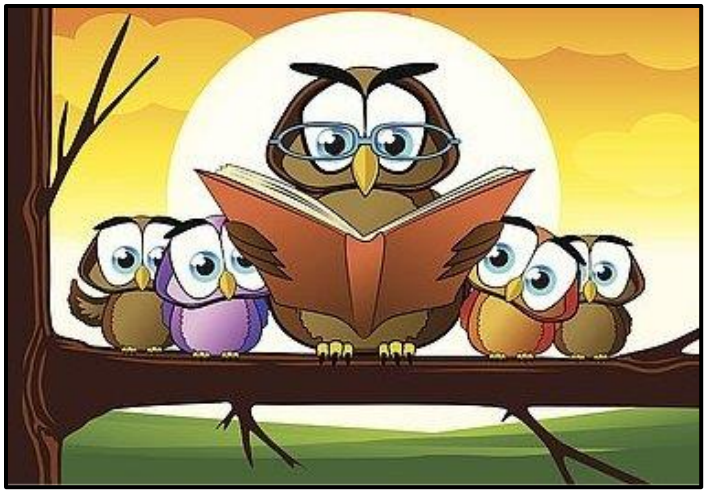
Maybe he did earn that much, or maybe he didn't—most sources suggest that he was not a great business man and that his wife Lucy helped finance his endeavors. Either way, I think what dancing and birding have in common is that both require you to be very much in-the-moment. Have you ever noticed that when the birds are active and diversity is high, hours can go by without your realizing it? The same is true in dancing, when the music is varied and interesting, and the lead and follow communication between partners is clear and flows easily. So, all of you birders out there, maybe give dancing a try! With some practice, I think you might find enjoyment there, too.

Workshop for Beginning & Intermediate Birders
By Larry Weeks

The Five Valleys Audubon Society will offer a workshop for beginning and intermediate birders. This workshop should appeal to birders just getting started and to birders who want to improve their identification skills. It will consist of four classroom sessions and one field trip.

The classroom sessions are scheduled for Thursdays on April 4th, 11th, 18th, and 25th and will be held at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Office at 3201 Spurgin Road. They will start at 7:00 pm and last until 9:30 pm. The program will include a full session on raptors and 30 to 60 minute sessions on bird anatomy, migration, waterfowl, woodpeckers, shorebirds, warblers, sparrows, and birding-by-ear. The field trip will be held on May 4th. There will be a $35 charge for the workshop.

To sign up, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 (home), 540-3064 (cell) or at bwsgenea@gmail.com.



Field Trip Summary
By Larry Weeks and Rose Leach

Saturday, February 23rd: Our late February field trip to the Mission Valley to look for wintering raptors has always been a favorite trip for the Chapter. And we weren't disappointed. This year, we were joined by Lauren Heiser and Dan Ellis from KPAX for the first half of the trip. They filmed some birds and did a couple of short interviews with Rose L. and myself. They produced a short video that aired on the 5:30pm and the 10pm news, which turned out pretty well for our Chapter. They also seemed to enjoy the trip, and to appreciate our interests in our local birds and wildlife. Thanks, Lauren and Dan!

We started checking the various side roads out of Ronan by first traveling on Little Martin Road. We immediately encountered lots of Red-tailed Hawks, a few Rough-legged Hawks and many Bald Eagles of various ages. We also got good looks at American Tree Sparrows in an open field with weeds and grasses that were above the snow. This little winter visitor from the arctic is always a treasure for us to find on a field trip.

As we traveled north on Leighton Road, we continued to see lots of raptors—each seemingly a slightly different plumage or shade from others seen of the same species. On one quarter mile stretch, we also had 2 Sharp-shinned Hawks, a Merlin and an American Kestrel. After a pit stop in Polson, we went to the sewage ponds. On the entrance road, the lead car saw a perched Merlin, which was immediately harassed by a Great Horned Owl. The Merlin proceeded to dive bomb and call at the owl twice before leaving. This gave us great views of the banded tail and pointed wings of this small falcon. The sewage ponds did not have much open water, but there were both goldeneye species, and lots of Lesser Scaup.

Valley View Road continued to produce buteos, Bald Eagles and Great Horned Owls. One of the owls was close to the road and totally exposed for excellent viewing. We could easily study its white neck band and its ear tufts blowing in the wind. As we continued south on Moiese Valley Road, we found a mixed flock of birds in an open field that included juncos, a few American Tree Sparrows, and Horned Larks. In the flock of Horned Larks, several of us were able to find a few individuals with white throats—subspecies *articola*. This arctic subspecies only comes to Montana during winter. We looked the flock over carefully for any potential wintering Lapland Longspurs or Snow Buntings, but there were none in this flock. We studied the larks climbing up small flower stems above the snow, to find and eat remnant seeds, a necessary behavior for this prairie species during winter.

There was a large flock of 30-50 American Robins feeding on juniper berries near the Flathead River, at the bottom of the Moiese Valley Road. This small, habitat-diverse microsite is always good for birds. With the robins were a Townsend's Solitaire, a few Black-capped Chickadees, and a male Hairy Woodpecker that was excavating seeds from pine cones located near the tip of a medium-sized Ponderosa Pine. We and the birds appreciated both the seeds and the fairly mild day, where the birds could find and consume this fat-rich food.

The Foust Slough had at least 1000 Mallards (or more) and 6 Trumpeter Swans. The water there looked black with mud or rocks—but these were actually all ducks! There were 20 people on the trip and we had 41 species. The breakdown of the raptors was 35 Red-tailed Hawks, 18 Rough-legged Hawks, 2 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 2 Merlins, 1 American Kestrel, 1 Northern Harrier, 27 Bald Eagles, and 6 Great Horned Owls. It is interesting to note that the Deer Lodge and Mission valley field trips were conducted during favorable weather conditions which were followed on Sunday by arctic blasts. What a difference a day makes!

Photo Above
Horned Larks
By Steve Flood

Photo Left
Rough-legged Hawk
By Bryce Robinson

Exciting News from Montana Audubon

Montana Audubon will host its 20th annual Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival at the Cottonwood Inn, in Glasgow from June 7th through June 9th, 2019! This longstanding, community event celebrates Montana's native bird species. The festival attracts hundreds of wildlife enthusiasts from across the state and beyond. For 2019, the festival lead sponsor is American Prairie Reserve (APR).

Online registration is now OPEN and the stunning, full color brochure can be downloaded on our website: http://mtaudubon.org/birding/montana-bird-festival/

Nominate a Conservation Leader for a 2019 Montana Audubon Award!

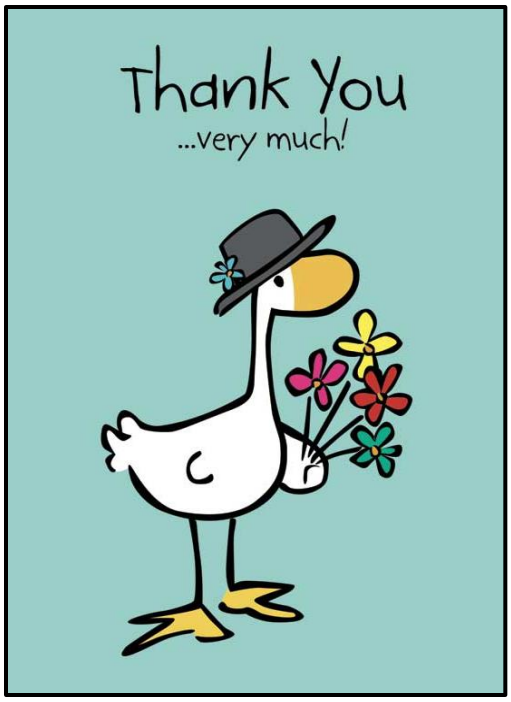
Nominations are now being accepted for Montana Audubon's 2019 awards. Consider nominating someone you know for Conservationist of the Year, Environmental Educator of the Year, Citizen Scientist of the Year, or a Lifetime Achievement award! Nomination forms can be found on our website: mtaudubon.org/about/awards/. The deadline for nominations is May 20, 2018. Please submit via email (preferred) to info@mtaudubon.org or by mail to Montana Audubon, PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624. Award winners will be announced at our Bird Festival banquet in Glasgow on June 8.

Award Categories:

- Conservationist of the Year. For an individual who has provided significant wildlife conservation achievement in Montana.
- Environmental Educator of the Year. For a person who has shown outstanding achievement in educating others about birds, other wildlife, and conservation of habitat.
- Citizen Scientist of the Year. For a person contributing significantly to our knowledge and understanding of birds and their habitats through monitoring and observations.
- Lifetime Achievement Award. For an Audubon volunteer who has dedicated extraordinary effort, time and energy to shape the activities and successes of a local Audubon Chapter and/or Montana Audubon.

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.



Thanks & Welcome to Our New Members

William V. Ballew
David & Cheryl Belitsky
Lola Bergseng
Jacqueline Bussjaeger
Peggy Christian
Mark Hollinger
Todd Kowalski
Sandy Skorupa
Miriam Barber
Kimberly Bell
Dorothy H. Brock
Jean Callahan
Sandy Dorsett
Jeff Kooris
Evan MacArthur-Waltz
Bobby Tilton

Five Valleys Audubon Society greatly appreciates those who renewed their membership this past month. We generally encourage members to receive their newsletter via email (to conserve resources and our expenses), which is the default mailing option if provided by new members. If you want to change how your newsletter is delivered or have any changes to your mailing preferences, please contact the Membership Chair, Poody McLaughlin, at pmcregan@bresnan.net.

Five Valleys Audubon Society Membership Application

Please support Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS). There are several ways to donate. Any method ensures that you will receive our *Birding Observer* newsletter and may 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: fvaudubon.org/join

$_____$15 FVAS membership only, includes newsletter sent via email.

$_____$25 FVAS membership only, includes newsletter sent via USPS.

$_____ General Fund, use as needed for conservation, field trips, education and outreach.

$_____ Philip L. Wright Fund, small grants for student research.

$_____ Legacy Fund, creating and supporting local urban bird habitats for citizen enjoyment without leaving the city.

$_____Total contribution

_____ Volunteer - Please contact me. I would like to know more about how I may help birds and FVAS.

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: fvaudubon.org/nas. 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 (MA), is also an independent organization and receives no financial support from NAS. MA handles statewide issues and is responsible for its own fundraising. To assist in this important statewide work you may contact MA through their website: http://mtaudubon.org/. Please give generously to each organization. Although independent, we work together to protect what we all love.

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