December 2014

Birding Observer

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

Calendar of Events

- **Monday, December 1st, 7:00pm:** The next board meeting will be held at Naturalist's Mercantile, 131 East Main Street in downtown Missoula.
- **Monday, December 8th, 7:30 pm:** Join us to hear - Kate Davis discuss raptors. The meeting will be held in the Gallagher Business Building, room L14, at UM.
- **Monday, December 15th**: Submission deadline for the January edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, December 20th:** Take part in the Missoula Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 20, 2014. See page 2 for more information.

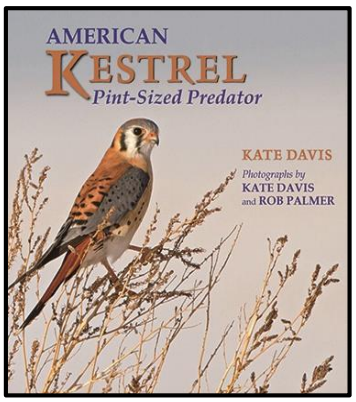
Raptor Redux

Illustration by Kate Davis

Monday, December 8th: Kate Davis of Raptors of the Rockies will present a lively Five Valleys Audubon program on Monday, December 8th at 7:30 p.m. We will meet in room L14 of the Gallagher Business Building on the UM campus. Kate's presentation will focus on Aplomado Falcons and American Kestrels, featuring feathered-friends Wes, the Kestrel and Sonora, a Aplomado Falcon from the Peregrine Fund. Two additional raptors will also be on hand, and of course we'll practice "hooting like owls."

Kate has been providing educational programs to schools and the public using live birds of prey for more than 26 years, now totaling 1,515 programs. She keeps 18 non-releasable and falconry birds at the facility at her house on the banks of the Bitterroot River. These birds are the subjects and source of inspiration for her photography, drawings, paintings, etchings, welded steel sculptures, and writing, with five books to date. *Raptors of the West Captured in Photographs* won the National Outdoor Book Award in 2011. *Bald Eagle Nest-A Story of Survival in Photographs* came out last year, which describes a nest that fledged four young (a very rare feat). Her latest book, *American Kestrel: Pint-Sized Predator* just hit the stands in November, with 100 photographs. Kate will have a stash of all of her books for the signing – and bookmarks for all our friends!

David Sibley, author of *Sibley Guides*, has praised Kate's latest book. "Incredible photography is the centerpiece of this book, and it will immediately grab your attention: alternately awe-inspiring, intimate, humorous, surprising, and familiar. It is like flipping through the pages of the Kestrel family photo album, with text that complements the photographs, telling the full story behind each moment. Kestrels are overflowing with charisma, and Kate Davis and Rob Palmer have managed to capture that elusive charm in this fitting tribute to a remarkable little falcon."



The cost of each book is $18.00, and a portion of the proceeds will help fund Raptors of the Rockies.

Peeps From The Board: Birding Glacier Park – Part I
By Larry Weeks

In the beginning of June, Radd Icenoggle and his birding team did a Big Day in Montana and set a new record of 197 birds. One of the more unusual birds was a boreal owl at Bowman Lake. I suggested to Rose Leach that we should make a trip to Bowman Lake and look for the boreal owl. So, on July 1, we loaded up her Subaru for a 3-day trip to Glacier. After entering the park, we headed north on Camas Road. Our first birding stop was McGee Meadow which was mostly flooded with water up to one foot deep. We sloshed around in the meadow after replacing our normal footwear with old sneakers. The best bird at McGee was a small flock of black swifts. Lincoln's sparrow, western tanagers, yellow-rumped warblers, red-winged blackbirds, common yellowthroats, and soras were also present.

We then proceeded to Polebridge and then a 6-mile pothole road to Bowman Lake. This was my first visit to Bowman Lake. After setting up our tents, we birded an uphill trail out of the campground. We were frustrated with some chickadees that stayed in the upper canopy. We thought they were boreal chickadees but were unable to confirm. After a salad and stew dinner, we hiked about one mile along the lake to the start of the trail to the Bowman Lake Lookout. We got a close-up scope view of a 3-toed woodpecker and heard a common loon. At 5:00 AM the following morning, Rose shook my tent to inform me that she heard the boreal owl. We tried to get closer but I was never able to hear the owl, because the call was too soft for my poor hearing. After breaking camp, we decided to hike to the Bowman Lake Lookout which is a 13.2 mile round trip and an elevation gain of about 2000 feet. Before we got to the turnoff for the lookout, Rose spotted a chickadee entering a cavity. We got into position above the cavity and watched the opening through a spotting scope. It turned out to be a boreal chickadee, a target bird. As we progressed up the trail towards the lookout, we got good looks at yellow-rumped warbler, Townsend's warbler, brown creeper, and Pacific wren. The song of the Swainson's thrush was always present wherever we went. The last half of the climb was hot and there were no birds. As we neared the lookout, Rose received a phone call from Jeff Marks about a potential sighting of a black rail near Moiese. Lucky to have phone service. We then returned to Apgar and found the Fish Creek and Apgar Campgrounds were full. We ate a salad and chili dinner in the picnic area. At my suggestion, we started looking for a campsite with a motor home that would not be using the tent space. The first motor home I approached to ask permission to park the Subaru, the individual from Colorado Springs told me that they had just decided to leave and that we were welcome to their space which was already paid for. Sometimes you just get lucky. When we left the campsite at 7:00 AM the following morning, there was an individual waiting for us to leave so he could reserve the space. We then drove to the Camas Creek Trailhead and hiked in about 2 miles. We found olive-sided flycatchers on the drive up the Inside North Fork Road. The target birds at Camas Creek were great gray and northern hawk-owls, but we failed to locate either bird. We did hear some wolves on the hike in and we weathered a thunder storm. Birds on the Camas Creek Trail included Lincoln's sparrow, sandhill crane, red-naped sapsucker, and Wilson's warbler. We then hiked into Howe Lake. There were common loons on the second lake and an American kestrel entering a cavity by the first lake. On the return trip to Missoula, we stopped at Moiese and looked at the habitat where the reported black rail sighting occurred. Rose returned at a later date and decided that the black rail was not present. For the 3-day trip we had 50 species. This isn't a big list but they were quality birds. It is also easy to take it for granted how pristine the Glacier habitat is, especially when you get off the beaten path.

Boreal Chickadee

Missoula Christmas Bird Count

The Missoula Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 20, 2014. If you would like to participate in the field count, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 (540-3064 cell) or bwsgenea@gmail.com. If you are interested in being a feeder watcher, contact Rose Leach at 370-1999 or rleach-2@bresnan.net. The Count will end with a potluck dinner at the home of Larry Weeks, 2428 West Kent. Dinner will commence at 6:30 PM. Bring your favorite potluck dish, 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.

Two Cases of Terribly Successful Species Introductions by Harry Nehls of Portland Audubon Society

In 1852 Eugene Schieffelin, a rich influential New York businessman, noticed an outbreak of caterpillars in the trees near his home in Manhattan. He imported and released several House Sparrows to combat the insects. His introduction was successful and the birds soon expanded through the city. Later introductions in other parts of the country added to the expanding population. The House Sparrow soon occupied all suitable habitats in North and Central America. Encouraged by his successful sparrow introduction, Schieffelin enlisted fellow businessmen to form the American Acclimatization Society. The main aim of the society was to bring to America all the songbirds mentioned by Shakespeare. By 1877 the society was regularly releasing European songbirds into New York's Central Park. Among the large number of species released was the European Starling. During the spring of 1890 Schieffelin released 60 Starlings in Central Park. The next spring he released another 40 birds to the flock. The introduction was successful. It is believed that all the Starlings we see today are descendants of these Central Park birds.

Smaller, less financed groups were organized to introduce foreign birds into the United States, but few matched the efforts of the New York organization. The German Song Bird Society of Portland, Oregon, founded by wealthy Portland businessmen Frank Dekum and Charles Pfluger, was one of the more successful organizations. The chief aim of this society was to introduce German songbirds to comfort homesick German immigrants that were then pouring into the city. From 1889 to 1907 the society introduced 19 species involving 400 pairs of German song birds, including 35 pairs of Starlings. Most of these were released into the downtown Portland City Park. Later the name of the group was changed to the Portland Song Bird Club and their efforts were expanded into the entire Willamette Valley. In a letter to Schieffelin, Charles Pfluger reported that almost all released species were doing splendidly and that the Skylark could be heard singing all over Oregon.

Pfluger's letter to Schieffelin was probably highly exaggerated. If it was or not, every species released by the society soon disappeared including the Starling. The expansion of the New York Starling releases reached Oregon about 1943 and quickly swamped the state. Despite the expenditure of time and effort, many thousands of dollars, and the displacement of hundreds of birds, of all the foreign species introduced by the New York and Portland organizations and other smaller groups, only the Starling and House Sparrow were successfully introduced.

In 1900 the Lacey Act was passed prohibiting the introduction of foreign plants and animals without a thorough scientific study of the effects on local populations. In 2013 the act was revised to effectively abolish all introductions of foreign plants and animals.

ATTENTION Bird Nerds

OK, bird nerds, let's test your knowledge about migration. No, this does not have to deal with 'snowbirds', but of the 40% of all bird species on the planet. I will list the questions and the answers will be on a following page.

Which species flies the fastest during migration? OK, here is a hint, they fly over 60 mph on their 4,200 miles migration. Next, which ones are quickest? OK, a little help here, it is a non-stop flight over the Pacific and they get 7,000 frequent flyer miles. Speaking of distance, which ones go the furthest? I mean, who gets the most frequent flyer miles? Let me think…there is no free first year credit card involved….but the annual miles are almost 50,000 miles!!

If you are counting, this is question no. 4, which species have trouble taking off? So, this is a politically correct question. In order to translate into Montanan, they are the 'fat' birds. They gorge themselves up to double their weight before taking off on their 2,300 non-stop flight. Well, finally, the last question, which birds are high when they fly…opps, I mean the highest fliers? And the last hint, they fly over the Himalayas.

Good luck, and there may be a cash award for all those who get the correct answers!

Wings Across the Big Sky Festival 2015

The time has arrived! It's time to begin planning and spreading the word that **Montana Audubon's *Wings Across the Big Sky Festival*, co-hosted by Last Chance Audubon Society,** is June 5-7 at the Red Lion Colonial Hotel in Helena. We invite you to spread the news and enthusiasm so we can all enjoy a fantastic turnout. Invite your out-of-state and nearby friends, birders and non-birders alike, to visit the Capital City and surrounding areas where you can participate in abundant festival activities.

Included in this year's activities are close to 20 field trips scheduled each of two days. These include trips into Helena Valley grasslands, wetlands, forest and field, with the anticipation of seeing a varied array of species.

Festival headquarters will be located at the Red Lion Colonial Hotel at 2301 Colonial Drive in Helena. This venue is going to supply us with excellent opportunities to host an expanded display area, concurrent Saturday afternoon presentations, a fun Friday night festival kickoff event hosted by Last Chance Audubon, our keynote speaker (see below), and a Saturday evening banquet dinner.

We are pleased to announce that Scott Weidensaul will be our keynote speaker. He is the author of over two dozen books on natural history, including the Pulitzer Prize finalist "Living on the Wind," about bird migration; "Return to Wild America: A Yearlong Search for the Continent's Natural Soul"; and "Of a Feather: A Brief History of American Birding." His last book, "The First Frontier: The Forgotten History of Struggle, Savagery and Endurance in Early America," was published in 2012, and he is the author of the forthcoming "Peterson Reference Guide to Owls." Weidensaul is a contributing editor for *Audubon Magazine* and writes for a variety of other publications. He lives in the mountains of eastern Pennsylvania, where he studies the migration of hawks, owls and hummingbirds.

Each month we will continue to feature developing news on the 2015 Bird Festival. Stay tuned!

For more information contact Cathie Erickson, Bird Festival Coordinator: cerickson@mtaudubon.org.

Mid-sized Binoculars have Found their Niche!

Reprinted from the Portland Audubon newsletter

While most nature lovers enjoy the stunning visual images offered by full-sized binoculars, we have found a growing niche for the expanding range of mid-sized binos now on the market.

While a full-sized binocular is typically one with an objective lens of 42mm, a standard mid-sized will have a smaller objective lens of around 30–32mm. Though the smaller lens doesn't allow as much light to reach your eyes, so viewing is not quite as bright in low-light situations like dawn or dusk, there are some great benefits for downsizing!

First, with smaller objective lenses, binoculars are lighter and more compact. Another benefit is that, even though they are smaller, many mid-size binoculars have a wider field of view than their full-sized counterparts. For example, a full-size 10x42 Swarovski EL has a 336-footwide field of view (FOV) at 1000 feet, while the mid-size model 10x32 has a much wider 360-foot-wide FOV. Some models even offer shorter close-focus distances, like the 8x32 Vortex Viper with an incredible 3-foot close focus which is superb for butterfly and insect observation (a full-size Viper 8x can only focus down to 5.1 feet). And you can counter the loss of light due to smaller lenses by upgrading to binoculars featuring extra-low dispersion (ED) glass which offers brighter images than conventional optical glass.

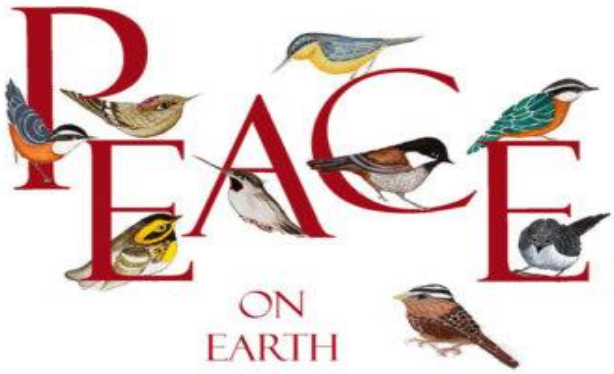
ANSWERS for the Birdee Nerders

OK, to be honest there has been a big debate over whether to list the answers to the migration questions in this newsletter or to wait until the next newsletter. The purpose in waiting is to help birders become more patient and not give in to our cultural need for immediate gratification.

This great debate has been between me and myself. Luckily, I have provided a solution. The answers will be given in no specific order (but will be listed correctly in next month's newsletter, so keep your membership current): Bar-tailed Godwits, Arctic Terns, Great Snipes, Bar-headed geese, and Blackpoll Warblers.

Welcome New Members

Lorraine Alrawi
Josephine Blue
Marty Kay
Cana Odegaard
Karen Rising
Linda Swanberg
John Swanson
Brittany Webster



Go Green and Save!

Do you want to help Five Valleys Audubon Society save money, paper and volunteer time? Please consider reading your Birding Observer online. Your online copy will contain content in color, and you will receive your newsletter much earlier than the mailed hard copy! If you wish to receive your Birding Observer via email, just send us a request with your name to Vick Applegate at k7vk@arrl.net. You can also find your current newsletter on the Five Valleys Audubon Society website at www.fvaudubon.org. Thanks!

Join Five Valleys Audubon Society

Please enroll me as a Chapter member of the Five Valleys Audubon Society. I will receive the Birding Observer and may participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues remain entirely with the Chapter.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City:_____ **State:**_____ **Zip:** _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please note: The newsletter will be delivered electronically unless requested otherwise.

___ $15 is enclosed for Chapter-only membership

__ An additional sum of $_____ is also included to support Chapter activities.

Please make check payable to the Five Valleys Audubon Society and mail to:

Five Valleys Audubon Society
PO Box 8425
Missoula, MT 59807

Join National Audubon Society
& Five Valleys Audubon Society

Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and my local Chapter. I will receive the *Audubon* magazine and the *Birding Observer*, and I may participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues are shared between NAS and my local Chapter.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City:_____ **State:**_____ **Zip:** _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please note: The newsletter will be delivered electronically unless requested otherwise.

__ $20 for a 1-year individual or family membership

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