December 2019

Birding Observer

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

Calendar of Events

- **Monday, December 2nd, 6:45-8:45pm:** The Five Valleys Audubon Society board meeting will be held in the Small Meeting room of the Missoula Public Library.
- **Friday, December 6th, 4:30-6:30pm:** Holiday Pop Up Sale and First Friday with Patagonian Hands at the Montana Natural History Center.

- **Sunday, December 8th:** All-day field trip to the Mission Valley to look for wintering raptors. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 7:50AM or at the Cenex Gas Station in Ronan at 9AM. This is a mostly driving field trip with frequent stops to look at the birds. We will spend much time outside of the car, so be prepared for cold temperatures, wind, and snow or rain. Also, bring a lunch and water. We generally make a restroom stop at mid-day but times vary depending on the birding. Although not required, feel free to offer your driver gas money.
- **Monday, December 9th, 7pm:** Betsy Ballard will present on Costa Rican birds and wildlife at our December meeting, in room 122 of the Gallagher Business Building on the UM campus.
- **Saturday, December 14th:** Christmas Bird Count and potluck dinner. For details, please see the write-up on page 4.
- **Sunday, December 15th:** The deadline for the January 2020 edition of the Birding Observer.
- **Saturday, December 21st:** Beginning 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, but there is an outhouse available at the Wildlife Viewing Area.

Discover the Wilder Side of Costa Rica

Join us for our last chapter meeting of 2019 as Betsy Ballard transports us to Costa Rica for her talk entitled DISCOVER THE WILDER SIDE OF COSTA RICA: An Uncommon and Very Personal Adventure into Remote Natural Realms. Imagine signing up for a lifetime trip to Costa Rica with an ecotourism company, and when you arrive you discover that you are the only participants! That's exactly what happened to Betsy, her husband and her sister in 2017. They had a private tour provided by Natural Habitat Adventures Company. The trip included flying in a small private plane, staying in remote lodges, hiking in rain and cloud forests, floating down rivers, visiting archeological sites, birding and wildlife watching.

Costa Rica is home to one of the highest levels of bio-diversity in the world. The country's cloud forests, humid lowlands, dry forests and mangrove swamps are some of the six ecological zones and more than 12 ecosystems that are home to more than 900 species of birds.

Betsy grew up in Wisconsin and says she owes her love of the outdoors to her parents who took the family on hikes and canoe trips. Betsy earned a degree in Forestry and Natural Resources. Her subsequent Forest Service career spanned four western states. She then spent two years with the Bureau of Land Management working on the management plan for the newly created Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument in Utah. She then moved to Montana to work on the Bitterroot National Forest, Stevensville Ranger District. Betsey retired five years ago. She is married, has a dog, two horses and a pair of Red-tailed hawks that nest in her front yard. Betsy is the Education Chairperson for Bitterroot Audubon Society.

The meeting will take place at 7PM on December 9, 2019, in the Gallagher Business Building on the University of Montana campus. PLEASE NOTE: This is finals week, so the meeting will be held in Rm 122, next door to our usual meeting room. Parking may be an issue, so please plan accordingly.

Peeps from the Board: Green Birding
By Jeff Ipsen

If you'd like to burn less fossil fuel while birding, my personal favorite is birding by bicycle. It has many advantages over birding by car. You're more connected to the world around you. If you live in a populated place like Seattle, you won't be aggravated as much by the traffic and congestion. I always notice more on a bike than when I'm in a car. It's quiet, you can stop whenever you want, it's slower (maybe not an advantage for everyone), you might find unexpected birds between stops, and you can cover more ground than walking. It's affordable. Some people don't drive or can't afford to. You can easily get to all the hotspots in Missoula. You can go on a lot of the trails that you would walk. Some great places to try this are the Kim Williams Trail, trails in the Rattlesnake, and trails off Deer Creek Road. Some of the greatest advantages are that you can see better. You don't have the roof blocking your view, and the window glass is not distorting. You can hear better. You don't hear much of anything above 30 mph in a car. You feel less confined. And you won't be burning gas.

Some disadvantages are that you will be exposed to the weather (being connected to nature is not always a plus), you may have a mobility impairment or safety concerns, and you will cover less ground than in a car. You can have big days by bike, however, that cover 100 miles.

As for gear, you will want a snug-fitting harness for your binoculars. Rick Young Outdoors makes one that I've been meaning to try. It looks very uncomfortable but comes highly recommended. If you use a harness, you will be able to raise your binoculars as soon as you put your foot down. You could also use a front basket or bag for binoculars and a field guide. I put my other gear, snacks and water in a small backpack or fanny pack. Panniers might be nice, but I don't use them. I don't usually bring a scope. It won't stay in any of my small packs and I don't want to wear a backpacking pack. You could strap a scope and tripod to a back rack, but that would bother me. Panniers could work.

A few tips. Go slowly, pick a flat route unless you also want a workout, and take the back roads.

Other ways to go green birding are running and walking. I'm not a fan of running and birding. I don't like to stop, because it's too hard to get going again. I save running for workouts, but you will see birds whether you're trying or not. If you want to try it you will need to pare down your gear. You might want to carry your binoculars in your hand, even use mini-binoculars. Carrying things doesn't bother me too much. A fanny pack can carry a small notebook and your phone, which can have a field guide on it. Get a pack designed for running. Otherwise you'll look like the booty-pop infomercial. You'll also probably have to cut down on snacks and water, but you're likely to be out for less time.

Then there's the old standby, walking. All the advantages, plus you can bring your scope. You'll cover less ground, but it can be more productive. There are other ways, too. Mass transit, if you've travelled to a large city. Cross country skiing, similar to running. Roller blading … and think up your own.

When Winter Comes
A Poem by Regina Sauro

When the snow is deep and drifted
And the air is full of sleet
I wonder how the chickadees
Find food that they can eat.

I like to spread some crumbs outdoors
To feed the hungry throng,
And listen while they show their thanks
By bursting into song.

When all the summer birds go south,
These fellows stay behind
To brighten up the coldest day
By singing. They're so kind!

If everyone would spread some crumbs
Upon the pure white snow,
The birds would not be hungry
When cold winds begin to blow.

Field Trip Summary
By Larry Weeks

Sunday, October 27th: Although it was cold, the field trip to Brown's Lake had lots of sunshine. And we dodged snowy conditions the day before and the day after. A quick stop at the Clearwater River yielded Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead and Hooded Mergansers. The next stop was at the shallow bay on Brown's Lake. The highlight of that stop was 3 river otters that were fishing quite close to the road and eventually worked their way across the bay and exited the water at the cattails. Birds at that stop included several Eared Grebes, Ruddy Ducks, Buffleheads, Gadwalls, American Coots, and a Northern Harrier. As we worked our way along the edge of the lake, we had a Sharp-shinned Hawk land in a tree right next to the group, and there was a Common Loon in the middle of the lake. When we drove into the picnic area, there was a large flock of Snow Buntings that were feeding in the roads. The buntings remained in the area for much of our stay, and were approachable to within 50 feet. We figured out that the buntings were feeding on the buds and seeds of a low-growing plants in the roadways. What a treat. A White-winged Scoter was identified on the far side of the lake but it wasn't a satisfying look. Other birds on the lake included Western Grebes, Lesser Scaup, Ring-billed and California Gulls, A small flock of American Tree Sparrows were in the trees and shrubs.

On the Cut-off Road, we had Barrow's Goldeneye, Rough-legged Hawks, Trumpeter and Tundra Swana, an immature Bald Eagle, and a distant look at a Merlin. We had a total of 16 swans on the ponds or flying overhead. There were 21 people on the trip and Steve Flood tallied 37 bird species.

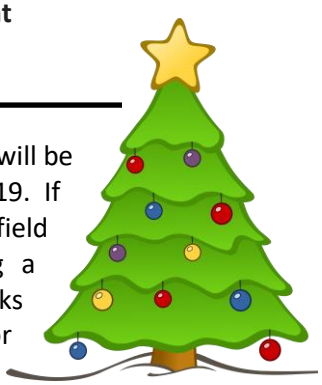
Saturday, November 2nd: As the group was assembling in the Adams Center parking lot, there were 2 Yellow-rumped Warblers foraging in the Norway maple trees. So we were off to a good start. When we arrived at the Metcalf''s visitor center, there were several white birds on Ponds 5 & 6 which included Tundra and Trumpeter Swans. There was also a good mix of diving and dabbling ducks. Pond 8 had a group of 7 Long-billed Dowitchers and we heard a Virginia Rail. American Tree Sparrows were scattered along the Kenai Trail as well as Song Sparrows and Black-capped Chickadees. On the drive from the visitors center to the Wildlife Viewing Area, we watched a Bald Eagle capture a Northern Pintail. The pintail might have been one wounded by a duck hunter. We looked for the Great Horned Owl but were unsuccessful until we ran into Tad and Marge Lubinski. Tad then showed us where there were 2 Great Horned Owls. Most of us only found one owl which was extremely well hidden. There was at least 1 porcupine in a nearby pine. Other birds included Brown Creepers, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, and White- and Red-breasted Nuthatches. As we left the refuge via Stevensville, 9 Wild Turkeys were just west of the road. Along River Road, there were about 40 California Quail in people's yards. There were 14 people on the trip and Steve Flood had 48 species.

Attention Bird Lovers

Raptors of the Rockies 2020 calendars are available from Kate Davis, Executive Director. Thirteen months are presented on heavy buff paper, and nearly every photo taken around the Raptor Ranch. 100% of proceeds go to the Raptors of the Rockies program.

Send checks ($20 + $5 shipping) to Raptors of the Rockies, P.O. Box 250, Florence, MT 59833.

2019 Missoula Christmas Bird Count
By Larry Weeks



The Missoula Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 14, 2019. If you would like to participate in the field count or are interested in being a feeder watcher, contact Larry Weeks by phone at 549-5632 (home) or 540-3064 (cell) or by email at bwsgenes@gmail.com. The Count will end with a potluck dinner at the home of Larry Weeks, 2428 West Kent, which is near Rosauers. 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.

Facts About Northern Cardinals

Many people send and receive holiday cards and gifts with a cardinal on it. Why, exactly, is the cardinal the bird we often see on holiday motifs?

- The cardinal is named after the high-ranking member of the Catholic Church that goes by the same name. The colonists were said to bestow the name because the male's red coloring and crest reminded them of the vestments worn by Catholic cardinals.
- Cardinals don't migrate and they don't molt into a dull plumage, so they're still breathtakingly beautiful in winter's snowy backyards.

Here are a few more facts about Northern Cardinals from The Cornell Lab that you might not know:

- Only a few female North American songbirds sing, but the female Northern Cardinal does, and often while sitting on the nest. This may give the male information about when to bring food to the nest. A mated pair shares song phrases, but the female may sing a longer and slightly more complex song than the male.
- The male cardinal fiercely defends its breeding territory from other males. When a male sees its reflection in glass surfaces, it frequently will spend hours fighting the imaginary intruder.
- A perennial favorite among people, the Northern Cardinal is the state bird of seven states.
- The oldest recorded Northern Cardinal was a female, and was 15 years, 9 months old when she was found in Pennsylvania.

SAVE THE DATE: Olympic BirdFest 2020
Sequim, Washington, April 17-19, 2020

Grab your binoculars and join the 17th annual Olympic BirdFest 2020 celebration at the Dungeness River Audubon Center, April 17-19, 2020.

Experience the magic of the North Olympic Peninsula...quiet bays and estuaries, sandy beaches, a five-mile-long sand spit, and a protected island bird sanctuary on the Strait of Juan de Fuca; wetlands, tide pools, rainforests, and lush river valleys. The birds will be sporting their finest spring plumage for this celebration. Enjoy guided birding trips, boat tour, and a gala banquet. Our featured speaker this year, Scott Pearson, is a researcher in Ecology, Marine Biology and Zoology at the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Come bird with us and discover with others the spectacular landscapes of the Olympic Peninsula …you just might go home with a new bird for your life list! Check out the offerings by going online (www.olympicbirdfest.org).

Precede your BirdFest weekend with a three-day, two night birding cruise of the spectacular San Juan Islands on April 14-16, 2020. Visit San Juan and Sucia Islands, and more. Stay at the historic Roche Harbor Resort.

Extend your Birdfest weekend with the Neah Bay post-trip, April 19-21, 2020. Spend 2 ½ additional days exploring northwest coastal Washington, a region rarely seen by birders.

Contact us by phone at 360-681-4076, or e-mail us at info@olympicbirdfest.org. You can also write to us at: Dungeness River Audubon Center, P.O. Box 2450, Sequim, WA 98382.

Welcome New Members:

Shirley Atkins
George Gehrig
Stephen Miller
Beth Ann Rothermel
Jon West
Maureen Flightner
Cherryl Hunter
Paul Mori
Guy Smith
Deborah Woody
Loreen Folsom
Linda Krieg
Andrea Niceschwander
Melanie Trost
Mike Young

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.

$_____ Phillip 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 (MTA), is also an independent organization and receives no financial support from NAS. MTA handles statewide issues and is responsible for its own fundraising. To assist in this important statewide work you may contact MTA 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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